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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 016867

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STATE DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

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SUBJECT: CUBAN ACTIVIST FERRER PREPARES CALL FOR PLEBISCITE

REF: HAVANA 15931

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Classified By: COM Michael Parmly for Reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Dissident Cuban doctor Darsi Ferrer remains conspicuously out of prison, two weeks after calling on the Cuban people to openly defy the Government. Ferrer told us August 23 he is fearful and uneasy over the GOC's failure to arrest him for his appeal, which was carried by five Miami-based media organizations. He shared with us a one-page statement he has written calling for a plebiscite on the transfer of power to Raul Castro. He is asking a number of pro-democracy activists to sign the statement; one has already refused and we suspect that others will follow. Ferrer also plans to stage a demonstration in downtown Havana with 15 colleagues, hoping to "create a crisis" for the Government. We admire his pluck but worry that his plans have not been sufficiently thought through. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Dissident doctor Darsi Ferrer remains out of prison, 14 days after calling on the Cuban people to stop cooperating with the Government. Ferrer told us August 23 he is fearful and uneasy over the GOC's failure to arrest him for his appeal, wondering if the Government has something even worse than prison in store for him. He shared with us a one-page statement he has written calling for a plebiscite on the transfer of power to Raul Castro. He says he is in the process of asking a number of pro-democracy activists to sign the statement, including Oswaldo Paya, Vladimiro Roca, Elizardo Sanchez, Manuel Cuesta Morua and the "Ladies in White." He asked for support August 23 from Martha Beatriz Roque of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society, but she refused.

TIME FOR THE PEOPLE TO DECIDE  
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¶3. (C) The nine-sentence statement, titled "Plebiscite for Sovereignty," states that many Cubans consider a hereditary succession to "another sick, elderly member of the military" to be unnatural and undemocratic. It says the people should approve decisions that affect all of society, and that is it time for the people to decide in a plebiscite whether or not to accept the transfer of power to Raul Castro. It concludes by insisting on the immediate liberation of all peaceful political prisoners, and an end to persecution of dissidents.

DEMONSTRATION PLANNED  
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¶4. (C) Ferrer intends to release the statement in Havana around the time of the September 11-16 summit of the

Non-Aligned Movement, which state media says will attract officials from 60 countries. In addition to releasing the statement, Ferrer plans to stage a demonstration in central Havana with 15 colleagues, hoping to "create a crisis" for the Government and unify the fractured opposition. "The dissidents are losing the current opportunity through inaction," he said.

#### UPHILL BATTLE

15. (C) Ferrer will face an uphill battle in obtaining support from leading Cuban activists. It is unclear what Roque told him in rejecting his request, but she had made clear to us that she considers Ferrer a GOC agent. On August 17, Ferrer met with leading "Lady in White" Laura Pollan and pitched the statement idea. The group has not yet informed Ferrer, but it decided at its monthly meeting on August 18 not to sign the statement. (Pollan told us that the Ladies in White are not political players and that signing the statement would undermine their neutrality.) Paya, whose Christian Liberation Movement (MLC) has eschewed formal cooperation with other groups in recent years, is busily planning to publicize his network's "program" and is unlikely to sign Ferrer's statement. Sanchez has been convalescing outside of Havana and may be unavailable to meet with Ferrer.

#### COMMENT

16. (C) We salute Ferrer's energy and stated aspirations, but are concerned that his plans are not sufficiently thought through, and that the demonstration would result in little more than a number of lengthy prison terms. However, Ferrer is correct in viewing the opposition's inaction as damaging. He deserves credit for seeking democratic progress at a time when most members of the opposition are laying low out of

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fear.  
PARMLY